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*I regard the matter
as a serious one*

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

20 January 1954

MEMORANDUM FOR THE BOARD

SUBJECT: Probable Communist Reaction to Release of POW's
(Re-revised Notes for DCI Briefing of the NSC)

1. Over the past week, the Communists have issued warnings that they would regard the return of the 22,000 POW's to the UNC and their subsequent release as illegal under the armistice terms. At a recent UNCMAC meeting, the Communist delegate told the UN delegates that "In order to insure the implementation of the terms of reference and prevent the armistice agreement from being further disrupted, thereby gravely threatening the peace in Korea, I put forth today a proposal which is of great significance and ask that your side should immediately put an end to all the treacherous activities for abducting the POW's. If your side persists in going your own way and gives no consideration to this serious proposal of our side, your side must bear the full responsibility for all the grave consequences." On 13 January, Indian officials told the British that the Chinese Communist reaction to the planned release of the prisoners continued to be very strong and that the Communists had told the Indians they could not "stand idly by" while the POW's were being returned to the UN.

2. It is our estimate, however, that these warnings do not indicate a Communist intent to ~~resort to violent action at Panmunjom~~ ?

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~~DECLASSIFYING~~

NO CHANGE IN CLASS. ☐

☒ DECLASSIFIED

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to resume hostilities in Korea, or to launch ^{armed} new aggression elsewhere in Asia. In our opinion, the Communists do not regard the disposition of the POW's as a matter sufficiently important to justify breaking the status quo in Korea. This was demonstrated when they accepted ^{the principle of} forcible repatriation arrangements during the armistice negotiations. It was also demonstrated when ~~they made~~ ^{by their} a de facto acceptance of the ROK release of 27,000 prisoners in mid-June prior to signing the armistice. On both occasions, the Communists protested at length and attempted to conceal their loss of position. They did not, however, permit the POW issue to prevent the negotiation and signing of the armistice agreement.

3. We believe that the withdrawal of major Chinese Communist forces from Korea, the announcement of long-range Communist plans for rehabilitating North Korea, and present Soviet and Chinese Communist emphasis upon domestic programs are evidence of a Communist decision not to resume hostilities in Korea. Recent Communist tactics concerning the POW's appear to have been designed largely to exert pressure on the Indians and to conceal the prestige losses the Communists suffered on the POW issue.

4. (The Communists probably estimate that any attempt to seize the 22,000 anti-Communist prisoners while still in the neutral zone would lead to a renewal of hostilities with UN forces. At best it would probably result in conflict with Indian troops, which the Communists almost

why their failure to intervene with force

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certainly wish to avoid. Hence, we believe that the Communists will not make such an attempt.)

5. The most likely Communist actions will consist of disturbances by Communist agents among the anti-Communist prisoners. (~~These disturbances may occur while the prisoners are still in Indian custody, or during or after their transfer to UN custody.~~) The purpose of such disturbances would be to give substance to the Communist contention that pro-Communist prisoners have been forcibly retained. The Communists will probably also continue to refuse to accept the 349 pro-Communist prisoners in order to dramatize their contention that the POW's have been illegally released.

6. Release of the prisoners to civilian status by the UN command will be denounced by the Communists as a violation of the armistice agreement, and will ^{could be} ~~probably become~~ the subject of extensive propaganda. The Communists might use ^{"violation"} ~~this~~ as a justification for actions on their own part violating the armistice agreement, such as a strengthening of their military position in North Korea. They might also use it as a ^{excuse} ~~reason~~ for refusing a demand for the return of UN nationals whom they still hold. We do ~~not~~ believe, however, that the Communists will ^{not} consider the release of prisoners, taken by itself, as a development requiring a major alteration ⁱⁿ of their previously determined policy in Korea. We ^{or elsewhere in the F/E} ~~there~~ also believe that the Communists will not regard the release of the


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stated in #2
- 3 -

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prisoners as the justification or pretext for launching ^{armed} aggression against Hong Kong, Formosa, Thailand, or Burma, or as a pretext for intensifying their aid in Indochina.

7. We believe that another purpose of the warnings, ^{noted in A1} in addition to obscuring the Communist defeat on the POW issue, may have been ~~to seek~~ to bolster the Communist bargaining position prior to the Berlin conference and an anticipated special UN session. By presenting the view that the POW release was illegal, that the Korean armistice has thereby been violated, and that a tense situation consequently has been created in the Far East, the Communists may be seeking to convince Asian and Western European governments that ~~only~~ a Five Power Conference can now ^{is essential to} lessen tensions in Asia.



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